4

Up close and personal – grow the trust fund

The problem with trust is that it's like a good partnership – you know it when you see it, but it's hard to define the specific factors. As an example, think about someone you know well and trust implicitly. What is it that makes you think of that person? What do they and you do to maintain the relationship? Now think of another person you know just as well but don't trust. Consider what it is that each of you does to create a relationship lacking in substance and value. What's the impact of such a relationship and what overheads or implicit costs does it impose? If you ask them to do a job or help you out, to what extent do you have to give up valuable personal time to check and oversee the work? Do you lose sleep because there is a fear in the back of your mind that they might not deliver on time?

The time that the client and coach spend with each other is an investment process, where each chooses to offer and donate their personal resources and capital to create social capital. Coaching partnerships are like savings accounts – we put time and energy into them in the hope that a return on investment will occur.

Managing your investment

There is a simple model of trust that can be used to measure and manage the nature of a relationship:

1. **T**ruthful – the extent to which integrity, honesty and truthfulness are developed and maintained.
2. **R**esponsive – the openness, mental accessibility or willingness to share ideas and information freely.

3 **U**niform – the degree of consistency, reliability and predictability contained within the relationship.

4 **S**afe – the loyalty, benevolence or willingness to protect, support and encourage each other.

5 **T**rained – the competence, technical knowledge and capabilities of both parties.

Where these five attributes are soundly in place, the coaching relationship might be deemed to be in credit. Where one or more of the factors is diminished or missing, it's possible the relationship is moving into a debit state.

“Slippage in any one area of the trust fund erodes the value of the total trust fund.”

It can be very easy to move the account sliders on the account into credit or debit, as seen in Figure 4.1. When working with a client you only have to give a false reason for being late one day to weaken the ‘Truthful’ slider; ignore some of their requests for help for them to feel that you're not being ‘Responsive’; tell them different things at different times to upset the ‘Uniform’ balance; be indiscreet about someone else to raise concerns about how safe they feel sharing personal issues; or appear not to be competent in the questioning process to reduce the value in the ‘Trained’ sub-account. Slippage in any one area of the trust fund erodes the value of the total trust fund and even worse reduces the opportunity to help deliver sustainable value.

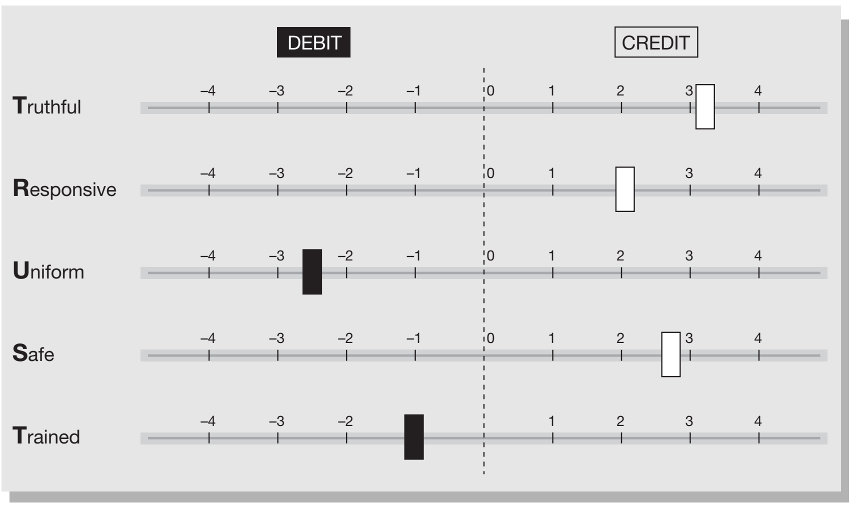


Figure 4.1 **Trust fund**

When considered in a coaching context, the trust factors might be described as follows:

- **Truthful:** Both the coach and the client have a responsibility to be honest with each other. When entering into a collaborative coaching partnership it is very easy to tell the other person what they want to hear. However, in most cases the truth will out. Once either party realizes that the other has been less than truthful all the good work will come undone.
- **Responsive:** This refers to the coach's desire to focus on the client's world and suspend their own needs. By understanding the client's world they can be 'with' them as a whole person and not just pick up on partial signals offered during the coaching session. In practice, demonstration of responsiveness can be verbal restatements of the client's emotions: facial expression of acceptance, such as smiling; body posture that shows interest in the client's world, such as leaning forward; the use of eye contact; not taking direct notes when they are talking; nodding or a soft tone of voice that does not seek to subdue or outdo the client's tonal volume or quality.
- **Uniform:** Much of the implicit value from the coach/client relationship comes from repetition. Because the coach and client meet on a regular basis they are able to build on previous trust deposits and so develop a stronger compound relationship. However, the moment that the coach is not consistent in their language and behaviour then doubt will be triggered. Nowhere is this more evident than in the parent/child relationship. When parents are consistent in their behaviour children learn to count on that parent and will feel more secure in their relationship. Once the parent starts to become inconsistent in how they treat the child then this creates confusion, dissent and distrust.
- **Safe:** Establishment of a safe environment for the client is paramount in the development of the other four trust levers. Unless the client really believes that the coach will not harm them physically, mentally or emotionally, any interaction will be constrained and cloaked in a protective veil. However, it can be difficult to explicitly determine what factors will make the client feel 'safe'. For some, safety might come from working with a coach who has shared similar experiences; for others it can be a formal contract of non-disclosure; in other cases it might be the use of a coach who has no contact with the people in the client's current work area. Often the simplest way is to ask the client

what would help them feel safe in the relationship and then check this out on a regular basis to confirm that the client feels secure.

- **Trained:** Think about any life situation where you seek help or development from another person. One of the key prerequisites might be clear demonstration of the person's knowledge and competence. This might be in the content area, i.e. do they have sufficient knowledge of the area to have a sensible conversation about the topic being addressed? Or it might be process competence, i.e. do they know how to coach? The important thing is for the coach to understand what the client needs to trust them and then to offer the necessary evidence in the early stage of the coaching relationship.

Consider the various factors that can deliver credits and debits:

Table 4.1 Credits and debits

	Debit	*Credit*
Truthful	■ Lie about the reason for being late to a meeting. ■ Give positive feedback to the client when they clearly know that it isn't warranted.	■ Share thoughts on last session including what went well and what didn't seem to be so effective. ■ Accept when a mistake is made and be open about it.
Responsive	■ Take a phone call part way through the coaching session. ■ Keep looking at the clock to see how long is left in the session.	■ Take time to prepare before meeting the client by reading previous session notes. ■ Accept that the client can have operational priorities that take precedence over the coaching session.
Uniform	■ Let personal moods drive behaviour – so one meeting is upbeat and the next downbeat. ■ Show incongruence by smiling with the mouth and not the voice.	■ Keep clear and consistent notes that don't vary across the session. ■ Use consistent language throughout the session.
Safe	■ Bad-mouth other clients. ■ Leave notes of the session on a desk in an open room.	■ Refuse to talk about what happens in other clients' sessions and keep all paperwork locked away. ■ Don't vary from the contracted process without agreeing with the client.

Table 4.1 Continued

	Debit	*Credit*
Trained	■ Don't have a professional manner and process. ■ Don't listen properly.	■ Offer demonstrable evidence of previous coaching experience and successes. ■ Ask the appropriate questions without mind-reading the client's views.

When the coach enters into a coaching partnership the client is entrusting their whole being to them. The client is saying, 'here I am offering this gift of "me", please look after it in all your dealings'. When acting as a coach you must be acutely conscious of the extent to which you are dealing with a gift that you have been entrusted with and all the explicit and implicit responsibilities that go with this role.

Coaching questions

Truthful
- How do you feel the last session went?
- Is there anything I have been doing that might cause offence or worry you?

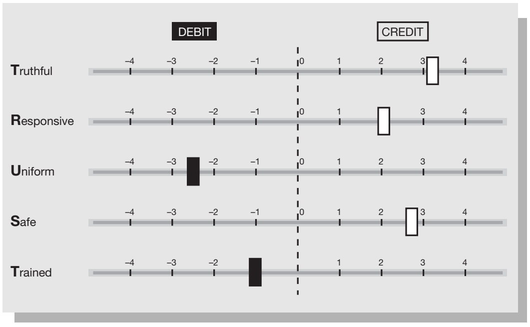
Responsive
- What would you like to cover at the meeting?
- What is important for you when we meet?

Uniform
- Is there anything that I do differently when we meet that might cause confusion?
- Is there any language I use that confuses you?

Safe
- Is there anything I can do to make you feel more comfortable when we meet?
- How do you want to deal with information that might be super-sensitive?
- What would you like to include in the coaching contract?

Trained
- Would you like me to outline my experience in this field?

John's journey



Trust fund

Julie was pleased that the contract with John had been established. She was then keen to develop a high-trust working relationship as quickly as possible so that she could commence the diagnostic process.

To aid this Julie suggested that she meet with John – just for a coffee and general chat to get to know each other. Julie had two goals with this session. First, to get closer to John and begin to build a level of rapport. Second, to explicitly talk to John about the need for trust in their relationship and agree how they could work to grow the level of the trust fund they shared.

Julie spent some time sharing the trust fund framework with John. This offered three important benefits. First, it gave them a shared language to talk about trust as an explicit topic and moved it into an arena where it could be talked about in the open. Second, it demonstrated that Julie was not afraid of climbing inside the deeper issues that are needed to help sustain a successful coaching partnership. Finally, it modelled the style and approach that Julie would be using under the Collaborative Coaching banner – namely 'teaching the coaching process precedes applying the coaching process'.